The Art of Statecraft: Kautilya's Arthashastra and the Diplomacy of Ancient India

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Abstract:

This research paper delves into the intricate and sophisticated world of statecraft and diplomacy as elucidated in Kautilya's Arthashastra, an ancient Indian text attributed to the renowned political strategist Chanakya (Kautilya). Through a meticulous examination of the Arthashastra and other relevant historical sources, this paper seeks to illuminate the multifaceted nature of statecraft and diplomacy in ancient India, exploring the principles, strategies, and practices advocated by Kautilya for the governance and international relations of the Mauryan Empire. The research delves into the comprehensive framework of statecraft outlined in the Arthashastra, encompassing governance, economics, military strategy, and diplomacy. Special emphasis is placed on the diplomatic principles and practices elucidated in the text, including assessments of different types of states, the conduct of ambassadors, espionage, and the art of forming alliances and treaties. Furthermore, the paper explores the relevance and application of Kautilya's diplomatic doctrines in the context of ancient India's interactions with neighboring states and empires, shedding light on the pragmatic and nuanced approaches employed by ancient Indian rulers in the pursuit of their strategic and diplomatic objectives. By engaging with primary sources and scholarly analyses, this research paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the enduring significance of Kautilya's Arthashastra in the realm of statecraft and diplomacy, while also offering insights into the historical and cultural context in which these principles were formulated and practiced. Ultimately, this study seeks to enrich our comprehension of ancient Indian political thought and its enduring impact on the theory and practice of diplomacy.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Statecraft, Republican, Arthasastra, Governance.

Ancient India had a long history of republican administration. Numerous autonomous Ganas (republics), such as the Agrasrenies in the Indus valley, the Kamboj in the west, the Panchals in the north, etc., existed when Alexander of Macedonia invaded. The author of Arthasastra,

Kautilya, was born during this time. In vanquishing Alexander's armies, he was instrumental. According to Kautilya, the lack of a powerful central Indian empire allowed Alexander to conquer India with relative ease. He would not allow the past to repeat itself. Thus, in contrast to the prevalent republican regimes of the time, the centralised Mauryan empire—in which he played a key role—was established. Thus, the subject of monarchical state government is the exclusive focus of his work Arthasastra. Hindu philosophy, according to many Western academics, is incompatible with the idea of a nation-state. It has been noted by Max Muller that,

> …the Hindus were a nation of philosophers. Their struggles were the struggles of thought, their past, the problem of creation, their future, the problem of existence It might therefore be justly said that India has no place in the political history of the world (Muller, 1859, p.31).

A "rational practical ethic" was something that Max Weber felt was missing from Hinduism. Because Hindu culture disregarded actual evidence, he reasoned, rational natural science could never flourish in India. In Vedic thought, the material and ethereal parts of a person are equally important. The two paths of nivriti (renunciation) and pravriti (enjoyment) are considered to be mutually supportive. The 'buddhijivi of the Vedic culture' came up with the idea of'shunya' (zero) and the decimal system, demonstrating that ancient India had a strong grasp of the 'rational sciences,' including mathematics. Many old dharmic teachings are based on the rationality ethic. A large number of Western academics have referred to Kautilya as the father of modern statecraft because to his treatises like the Arthasastra, which promote the use of reason "Machiavelli of India" (Ghoshal, 1923, p.7).

Kautilya obtained his name since he was a member of the 'kutil gotra' caste. He became known as Chanakya due to his birthplace and father's name both being Chanaka. Kautilya compiled and commented on the preexisting literature on politics and statecraft in his Arthasastra. While serving as Chief Minister in Chandragupta Maurya's court, Kautilya distilled them from his vast expertise and presented them in a logical and methodical fashion. Who exactly wrote Arthasastra is a matter of debate. Many Western academics have claimed that Kautilya couldn't have written it as many of the ideas presented within were only used in later times. Someone or someone later writing in the tradition of Kautilya may have used the name Kautilya as a pseudonym. Indian academics reject these claims, arguing that many of the ideas used by Kautilya date back to no earlier than the fourth century B.C. (Rao, 1958, pp.14-15).

In order to break free from the cycle of rebirth and death, the institution of state is established so that individuals might follow their dharma. Because it hindered dharma practice, the state of arajat (lawlessness) was despised. The Matsya-Nyaya (Law of the Fish), which governs the natural world, is mentioned in numerous old Vedic writings. In this kind of society, private property rights, or dharma, do not exist. The formation of the state, armed with the means of compulsion (danda), is necessary for the extraction of society from this mess. So, dharma practice and bhog (enjoyment) of private property rights are both made possible by the state. To some extent, the Vedic state exemplifies "qualified monism" because it acknowledged the independence and variety of the many social groupings that lived inside its borders. The citizens' allegiances were divided between the state and the guild or association. Two tenets—the military necessity and the concept of dharma—formed the basis of these affiliations. These groups' governing principles and code of conduct were crystal clear. They were fiercely protective of their independence, and the King had no right to interfere with their practices. The Superintendent of Accounts had to record every association's history, customs, and traditions to make sure the King and the associations didn't cross each other's boundaries.

Having said that, neither the individual body nor the state were in a competitive or turf-protective relationship. In facilitating the citizen's adherence to his dharma, both entities played an important role. Curiously, the individual's interest in the association was protected by the Department of Commissioners (Pradeshtarah). Consequently, safeguards were put in place to protect both the individual and the wider association from the State (Rao, 1958, p.74). As a defender of dharma, the King was revered as a paragon of virtue. His dharma guided him just as it did every other citizen. So, groups or individuals might challenge the King if he did anything that went against the accepted dharma. The king was not the only one who could explain dharma. Actually, there was no central body with the power to interpret dharma. It was considered that everyone could understand it. For the Vedic state to maintain its secular nature, this was a crucial component. According to Arthasastra, the state consists of seven parts,

- (saptanga,)
- Amatya (Officials)
- Janapada (Population and Territory)
- Durga (Fort)
- Kosa (Treasury)
- Bala (Military)

- Surhit (Ally)

Prabhushakti, the authority of the military and the money, Mantashakti, the counsel of intelligent men, especially the Council of Ministers, and Utsahshakti, charisma, were the three pillars upon which the king's power rested. Among the three sources, mantashakti, prabhushakti, and utsahshakti were considered the most powerful. The importance of the Council of Ministers, rather than a single figure like the King, in determining the fate of a state was clearly something that Kautilya believed in.

The Mantri Parishad followed the King. The King was commanded to consult the Parishad on all matters, as it embodied the collective knowledge of the community. There were two stories to the Parishad: the inner and outer cabinets. The chief minister, chief priest, military commander, and crown prince were the four members of the inner cabinet. To keep things running smoothly in the event of an emergency or smooth transition, the Crown Prince was included. There was no set number of people who made up the Outer Cabinet. It was inevitable that this body would ensnare the leaders of the most significant guilds. As a result, the Parishad's representational character was established (Rao, 1958, pp.86-7). The office of kingship, in Kautilya's view, embodied all moral and legal authority connected with the state, and he sang the praises of the state. Because of his position, the King was both an integral component of society and its protector. Nevertheless, the king was expected to see himself as the representative of the people and adhere to his dharma as prescribed in the Sastras. While the throne itself was holy, the one who held it was not (Sarkar, 1922, p.174).

'Divine Origin of the Monarch' is an idea that Kautilya disapproved of. The monarch was not the deity's representative. According to him, monarchs were human beings since the institution of monarchy was itself human. Nevertheless, as the guardian of the society's dharma, the king was believed to possess qualities above those of an ordinary mortal. He himself had to act in an exemplary manner. Everyone could see what he did because he had no secret life. It was the rayja dharma that the king had to adhere to. Part of that was being well-versed in all four academic disciplines. The king was required to exhibit Atma vrata, or self-control, by letting go of the "six enemies": desire (kama), anger (krodha), greed (lobha), conceit (mana), haughtiness (mada), and overjoy (harda). The kings and queens were obviously held to extremely high standards by Kautilya. He based many of his legislation on the actual model of the citizen, which is at odds with this. Every day, the King followed a very strict schedule. He

would sleep for eight nalikas, or fifteen minutes, every hour of the day and night. For each nalika, the King was entrusted with particular responsibilities.

A 'dharmic social compact,' as Kautilya called it, would exist between the monarch and the subjects. To fund the state's welfare system and ensure social order, taxes were imposed. The janapads (districts) might petition for tax exemptions if an external force attacked, claiming that the king had neglected his responsibility to safeguard the populace. The importance of the tax system in maintaining a society's economic well-being was something that Kautilya recognized. A characteristic of his tax system was 'certainty' - of time, of rate, and of the form of payment. For the Mauryan empire's trade and commerce to thrive, the tax system had to be stable. Because of this, the state was able to keep its welfare system and large standing army funded. The state was extremely aggressive in collecting taxes and used almost every available means. Tolls were paid by the citizens. The land tax was one-sixth of the harvest that farmers were required to pay. At regular periods, a land census was conducted, and meticulous records of land ownership were maintained. With this database, we were able to determine the household's taxable capacity. The tax that merchants were obligated to pay was equal to 10% of the merchandise's value. The fort's entrance, as well as the usage of roads and canals, and the issuance of passports were all subject to taxes. Even the woodland hermits had to give up a sixth of their grain harvest because they were dependent on the King for protection. People who worked in the service business, such as auctioneers, soothsayers, dancers, actresses, and prostitutes, were also taxed. An annual pilgrimage tax, or Yatra Vetna, was required of all pilgrims. The charitable deeds of the people were subject to a levy (Pranaya Kriya).

According to Kautilya, the rule of law is not a manifestation of individual liberty. Citizens did not therefore acquire sovereignty, or the power to legislate. Dharma (or sacred law), vyavhara (or proof), charita (or history and tradition), and rajasasana (or edicts of the King) were the four main places from which laws were derived. When competing legal codes clashed, dharma took precedence. The other laws were ordered according to individual cases. Every interaction between the citizen, the association, and the state was regulated by Rajasasana. Despite the rajasasana's specification of state-level constitutional norms, the members of the association were tasked with deciding on association-level constitutional rules. The association's operational level regulations and collective choice were both decided by the association's members, even though the state passed laws to protect individual members from the association's majority rule. There is a framework for civil, criminal, and commercial law in Arthasastra. Some examples of codified topics include: protocols for questioning, torture, and

trial; accused persons' rights; acceptable evidence; how to conduct an autopsy in the event of a suspicious death; principles of defamation and damage claims; and valid and invalid contracts.

Kautilya had established a vast and complex bureaucracy to oversee the administration of the Mauryan kingdom. This further demonstrated the state's centralized nature. There were thirty divisions in the bureaucracy, and each one was headed by an Adhyaksha. There was a clear specification of reporting linkages. The importance of the state providing public amenities that promote trade and commerce was foreseen by Kautilya. 'Quality control machinery,' a monetary system, and a system of 'weights and measures' were all provided by the bureaucracy. The idea of quality control was ground-breaking when it was first proposed. This points to a thriving commerce sector and picky consumers within the Mauryan empire. The Abhigyan Mudra, a state stamp made of sindura (vermillion), was used to designate goods as a quality indicator. There were severe consequences for counterfeiting. Officials in the bureaucracy were eligible for housing subsidies from the state and received a set salary. Officials were supposed to recompense themselves by retaining a portion of the revenue collected from the people, even in later centuries. This demonstrates Kautilya's profound grasp of statecraft. Since bureaucratic tenure was not passed down via families, the ad valorem model gave officials an incentive to overcharge taxpayers. With his background as chief minister, Kautilya likely saw the danger of this system and instituted a set compensation plan for the bureaucracy.

A principal-agent issue is inevitable in large bureaucracies. Decentralization of power, a spies/intelligence organization, and closely monitored standard operating procedures (SOPs) were the three approaches that Kautilya advocated for in order to address this problem. Standard Operating Procedures reduced the potential for bureaucrats to subjectively interpret regulations. The officers working under their supervision were closely watched by their superiors. The system of constant surveillance, however, has to have incurred massive transaction costs. So, it was augmented by the intelligence group that monitored the officials' corrupt activities. Officials were more cautious in their interactions with the public after the spies' successes in capturing corrupt officials received extensive media coverage. Political systems that were decentralized and polycentric, which gave power to local guilds, were another way to rein in the bureaucracy. As a result, bureaucrats had to deal with a strong local power center that knew about the royal decrees and made sure that no bureaucrat could use their own self-serving duties as a substitute for them. To discipline the bureaucracy, Kautilya

refrained from appealing to philosophy, which is an intriguing choice. He likely came to the realization that when bureaucrats break standard operating procedures, they are already acting in opposition to their dharma. How could a ruler-given ideology function if a socially sanctified belief system like a dharma failed to discipline the bureaucrat?

The period of mystery gave rise to Kautilya. His political acumen and military skill allowed him to vanquish the king of Nanda and Alexander of Macedonia. The king must be vigilant against both internal and exterior plots, says Kautilya. The monarch's own character (atma-dosa), the inner cabinet, religious orders, and autonomous associations/guilds are all examples of internal sources. Foreign powers that are hostile are considered external sources. The intelligence infrastructure was highly complex and had penetrated almost every field and institution, particularly those that involved large numbers of people, such as religious organizations. A spy could pose as a kapatika chhatra (a fraud), a grihapalka (a householder), a vaidehaka (a merchant), a tapas (an ascetic who practices austerities), a satri (a fellow student), a tikshna (a fireband), a rasada (a poisoner), or a bhikshuki (a woman who is mendicant). Intelligence gathering was a primary function of monks and the sanghas, which are associations of monks. In fact, Kautilya went so far as to propose hiding weapons inside an idol and then using them to kill a rival king during his adoration. That is why Kautilya had no qualms about utilizing religion as a tool of statecraft. He believed that the state, not religious institutions, was the most crucial prerequisite for adhering to dharma. In order to facilitate intelligence operations, a "national citizen register" and a visa and passport system were put in place. The birth and death registration requirements, as well as the periodic censuses, kept the register up-to-date.

The Arthasastra is an extensive manual for running a Vedic monarchy. Governance and statecraft were areas in which Kautilya excelled rationally. The monarchy and the state, in his view, were but human creations. Not only that, but his depiction of the human was spot on. The 'human' King, though, was not what he anticipated. This standard was met by Chandragupta, Bindusar, and Ashoka, but not by their successors. As long as the king desired it to, the system of checks and balances among the citizens, associations, and the king functioned admirably. For a couple of centuries, the Arthasastra's ideal society did in fact exist. Nevertheless, the fact that the Muslims were able to successfully invade in the eighth century revealed a significant shortcoming in the 'Hindu' society. The establishment of a robust and affluent Vedic order was central to Kautilya's idea for protecting India from foreign invasions. It was either the 'Hindu' rulers' administration did not adhere to the principles of the

Arthasastra or the philosophy of the Arthasastra had grown out of date if the Muslim conquest was successful. Both were probably correct. Without a doubt, monarchs had strayed from the Vedic concept of a "dharmic king," who was both a "servant" to the people and a guardian of the dharmic order. Castes emerged from the once-great Varna system. Only a glimmer of the Arthasastra's former radiance remained, with its rational and dharmic order. The Muslim invasion likely targeted a dormant order because it was easy prey.

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